



Coalition seeks grant to end drug use

Author: Corey Dickstein

SPRINGFIELD - Effingham County's fight against drugs would benefit greatly from a \$125,000 federal grant.

For the second year, the Effingham County Drug Free Communities Coalition applied for the Drug Free Communities Act that supports more than 700 certified drug-free communities nationwide, including 12 in Georgia.

Locally, Bryan, Bulloch and Camden counties have all received the grant.

The Bryan County Drug Free Coalition applied for and received the grant in 2008.

"It has been hugely beneficial to us," said William Collins, the coordinator for the Bryan coalition. "It's played a big part, obviously, in what we do - trying to provide prevention services."

The Bryan coalition has implemented a number of services in the county with its grant money, including peer-to-peer counseling, providing youth education programs in schools, aiding law enforcement and providing treatment options to people needing help.

Elaine Spencer, Collins' Effingham counterpart, said Effingham County would use the grant similarly.

The Effingham coalition met Thursday morning to discuss plans moving forward.

"We had a very productive meeting," Spencer said. "We've made the first steps of our next step."

That step is to compose ideas to educate the community.

And that, Spencer said, has to start with reaching out to parents and youth, alike.

"We have got to let the parents in our community know what meth is - all drugs," she said.

"We want them to know what to look for."

Spencer, the executive director of Effingham Family Connection, said she was happy to see law enforcement, schools and elected officials throughout the county take an interest in the coalition.

State Rep. Jon Burns, R-Newington, attended the meeting Thursday.

"We're all, certainly, very interested in the well-being of the county," Burns said. "We can help out law enforcement and our community do away with the surge of drugs."

Burns, a lifelong Effingham resident, said the county's struggle with methamphetamine begins with the drug's tremendous addictiveness.

"Experimenting one time with this drug is ruining lives," he said. "It's a horrifying drug."

Equally as scary is that, according to the Georgia Meth Project, 35 percent of the state's teens see "little or no risk in trying the drug." And 58 percent of Georgia teens say they have never discussed meth with their parents.

A nonprofit organization aimed at preventing the use of meth, Georgia Meth Project came to Effingham in May.

Spencer said the federal grant would allow the coalition to sponsor similar events in the county.

The local coalition will not find out until August if it will receive the grant, but with or without it, Spencer said, they will move forward.

"We're going to continue on with the coalition even if we don't get the grant," Spencer said.

"And then, we'll just keep applying for it."